



## Pastoral Perspective

Greg Albrecht

## Did God Forsake God?

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

—Matthew 27:46

### QUESTION

Thank you for all the great resources you provide. I’m trying to reconcile what seems to be Jesus’ “forsakenness” or the estrangement/alienation of God and Jesus on the Cross. How are we to interpret the Cross in light of his “cry of dereliction”?

### RESPONSE

My sense is that we should approach this (or any) debated statement with a Christ-centered interpretation. The following seven assertions are my attempt to do so:

1. *Jesus was and is God* (see John 1:1-3). He was never *not* divine, and forever *will be* divine.
2. *In his humanity, Jesus was and is God incarnate, fully human in every way.*
3. *In their deity* (divine nature), *the Father, Son and Holy Spirit* are eternally One God—co-equal, co-eternal and co-essential—in three divine Persons. They share one essence, one nature, one substance. They were and are and forever will be perfectly “one,” in perfect unity and harmony. All that exists flows from the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. This is the collective biblical revelation.
4. Given these revelations, how can God—eternal, perfect and uncreated—become human—mortal, imperfect and created—in one person?

Confronted with this question, early Christians believed and proclaimed that *Jesus Christ was one in nature (homoousios) with both God* (the indivisible Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit) *and with humanity*. The two natures are united in Christ’s one undivided person (*hypostasis*). Thus, early Christians believed that Jesus was and is both “very man and very God.” Not as a 50-50 hybrid, but perfectly and fully divine *and* perfectly and fully human—the singular

revelation of God in Christ, the incarnate God, in the person of Jesus.

5. Thus, according to the biblical evidence, *for the Father to literally “forsake” the Son is not possible.*

6. What then did Jesus mean in his last cry to his Father? Had God forsaken God? The answer comes by recognizing that, from the Cross, Jesus directly cites a verse from Psalm 22:1. *Jesus, in his humanity, was expressing “felt abandonment”—a very human experience of feeling distanced from God.* But we know in his divinity, Christ was then, as he forever had been, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit—without division then or ever.

Nor were Jesus’ two indivisible natures torn apart. Rather, as God Incarnate, he entered the human experience of abandonment for our sakes. He knew by experience every human feeling and emotion, quite apart from the divine logic that makes forsakenness by the Father and the Holy Spirit impossible—for him or for any of us!

On the Cross, Christ experienced humanity in a way that divinity does not—in the weakness of human flesh. He suffered as every human suffers.

7. *Did Father God forsake Jesus in his suffering? No, but that sense of “felt absence” is part of the profound significance and meaning of the Cross.* Jesus knew that he was not being “abandoned” in totality, for he completely trusted his Father. He said to his disciples, *“You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me”* (John 16:32).

Jesus applied Psalm 22:1 to the specific and existential events he was enduring—being mocked, beaten and tortured, pierced and having lots cast for his garments. But he was also fully aware of the totality of Psalm 22, including the punchline in verse 24: *“For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”* □

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